

Report IAM 19/41

REPORT OF THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE
REICH MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS (RAM)
AND THE JAPANESE FOREIGN MINISTER MATSUOKA
IN BERLIN ON 29 MARCH 1941.

* * * * *

The largest part of the German army was anyway on the Eastern frontiers of the Reich and fully prepared to open the attack at any time. He (the RAM) however believed, that Russia would try to avoid developments leading to war. Should Germany however enter into a conflict with Russia, the USSR would be finished off within a few months. In this case, Japan would have, of course, even less reason to be afraid than ever, if she wanted to advance on Singapore. Consequently, she need not refrain from such an undertaking because of possible fears of Russia.

* * * * *

He (the RAM) wanted to point out to MATSUOKA, in any case, that a conflict with Russia was anyhow within the realm of possibility. In any case, MATSUOKA could not report to the Japanese Emperor, upon his return that a conflict between Russia and Germany was impossible. On the contrary, the situation was such that such a conflict, even if it were not probable, would have to be considered possible.

* * * * *

The RAM declared that it was quite possible that the above-mentioned circumstances should very soon lead to a conflict between Germany and Russia. If Germany felt herself in danger, she would immediately strike and finish off bolshevism.

* * * * *

Japan had, however, to bear in mind that, in this war, the heaviest burden was resting on Germany's shoulders. The Reich was fighting against the British Isles and was tying up the British Mediterranean Fleet. Japan, on the other hand, was fighting only on the surface. Apart from that, Russia's main weight lay on the European side. These facts the gallant Japanese Nation would certainly acknowledge.

Matsuoka finally agreed to this point of view and gave an assurance that Japan would always be a loyal ally who would devote herself entirely, and not just in a lukewarm way, to the joint effort.

(Berlin. 31 March 1941.)

OFFICE OF U. S. CHIEF OF COUNSEL
A P O 124A U.S. ARMY
28 March 1946

This is to certify that the photostatic copies listed below are true copies of original enemy documents which were captured by the Allied Forces under the direction of the Supreme Allied Commander and are now in the custody of the U.S. Chief of Counsel for the Prosecution of Axis Criminality:

- 1877-PS Memorandum about the conference between the Reich Foreign Minister and the Japanese Foreign Minister, Matsuoka, at Berlin on 29 March 1941.
- 2929-PS Memorandum about the conference between the Reich Foreign Minister and the Ambassador Oshima on 18 April 1943 at Fuschl.
- 1834-PS Foreign Office, Reich Foreign Minister, #56/R. Extract of a memorandum about a conference with the new Ambassador from Japan, Oshima, at Fuschl on 23 February 1941.
- 2954-PS Memorandum about the conference of the Foreign Minister with Ambassador Oshima on 6 March 1943.
- 2897-PS Telegram, Tokyo, dated 14 July 1941. #1217
- 2898-PS Telegram, Tokyo, dated 13 November 1941. #2097
- 1881-PS Memorandum about a conference between the Fuehrer and the Japanese Foreign Minister, Matsuoka, in the presence of the Foreign Minister of the Reich and Minister Meissner, at Berlin, on 4 April 1941.
- 2896-PS Telegram, special train Westphalen, #707, dated 10 July 1941.
- C-75 Directive No. 24 concerning collaboration with Japan. Fuehrer Headquarters. Dated 5 March 1941.

GERARD SCHAEFER
1st Lt. Inf.
Chief, Documentation Division

Bepno:

Report RAM 19/41

REPORT ON THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE REICH MINISTER,
FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS (RAM) AND THE JAPANESE FOREIGN
MINISTER MATSUOKA IN BERLIN ON 29 MARCH 1941.

The RAM resumed the preceding conversation with MATSUOKA about the latter's impending talks with the Russians in Moscow, where they had left off. He expressed the opinion that it would probably be best, in view of the whole situation, not to carry the discussions with the Russians too far. He did not know how the situation would develop. One thing, however, was certain, namely that Germany would strike immediately, should Russia ever attack Japan. He was ready to give MATSUOKA this positive assurance, so that Japan could push forward to the South on SINGAPORE, without fear of possible complications with Russia. The largest part of the German army was anyway on the Eastern frontiers of the Reich and fully prepared to open the attack at any time. He (the RAM) however believed, that Russia would try to avoid developments leading to war. Should Germany however enter into a conflict with Russia, the USSR would be finished off within a few months. In this case, Japan would have, of course, even less reason to be afraid than ever, if she wanted to advance on Singapore. Consequently, she need not refrain from such an undertaking because of possible fears of Russia.

He could not know, of course, just how things with Russia would develop. It was uncertain whether or not STALIN would intensify his present unfriendly policy against Germany. He (the RAM) wanted to point out to MATSUOKA, in any case, that a conflict with Russia was anyhow within the realm of possibility. In any case, MATSUOKA could not report to the Japanese Emperor, upon his return that a conflict between Russia and Germany was impossible. On the contrary, the situation was such that such a conflict, even if it were not probable, would have to be considered possible.

X X X X
Next, the RAM turned again to the Singapore question. In view of the fears expressed by the Japanese of possible attacks by submarines based on the PHILIPPINES and of the intervention of the British Mediterranean and Home fleets, he had again discussed the situation with GENERAL-ADMIRAL RAEDER. The latter had stated that the British Navy during this year would have its hands so full in the English home waters and in the Mediterranean that it would not be able to send even a single ship to the Far East. General-Admiral RAEDER had described the U.S. submarines as so bad, that Japan need not bother about them at all.

MATSUOKA replied immediately that the Japanese Navy had a very low estimate of the threat from the British Navy; it also held the view that in case of a clash with the American Navy it would be able to smash the

latter without trouble. It was afraid, however, that the Americans would not take up the battle with their fleet; thus the conflict with the United States might perhaps be dragged out to five years. This possibility caused considerable worry in Japan.

The RAM replied that America could not do anything against Japan in the case of the capture of Singapore. Perhaps for this reason alone, ROOSEVELT would think twice before deciding on active measures against Japan. For while, on one hand, he could not achieve anything against Japan, on the other hand, there was the probability of losing the Philippines to Japan; for the American President, of course, this would mean a considerable loss of prestige and, because of inadequate rearmament, he would have nothing to offset such a loss.

In this connection, MATSUOKA pointed out, he was doing everything to reassure the English about Singapore. He acted as if Japan had no intention at all regarding this key position of England in the East. Therefore it might be possible that his attitude toward the British would appear to be friendly in words and in acts. However Germany should not be deceived by that. He assumed this attitude, not only in order to reassure the British, but also in order to fool the pro-British and pro-American elements until one day he would suddenly open the attack on Singapore.

The RAM declared that, in his opinion, Japan's declaration of war on England should take the form of an attack on Singapore.

In this connection, MATSUOKA stated, his tactics were based on the certain assumption that the sudden attack against Singapore would unite the entire Japanese nation with one blow. ("Nothing succeeds like success," the RAM remarked.) He followed here the example of the words of a famous Japanese statesman, addressed to the Japanese Navy at the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war: "You open fire, then the nation will be united". The Japanese need to be shaken up to awaken. After all, as an Oriental, he believed in fate which would come, whether you wanted it or not.

Later on, the discussion turned to the question of the transportation of rubber. The RAM asked Matsuoka to see what the possibility was of transportation by one or two Japanese auxiliary cruisers to Lisbon or to France.

Matsuoka replied that, immediately after the steps taken by Ambassador Ott in connection with the rubber question, he had interceded in favor of Japan delivering certain quantities to Germany from her own rubber stocks, and later on making up the resulting deficit in rubber from Indo-China.

The RAM pointed out in this connection that communication via Siberian railway was insufficient and that, moreover, 12,000 tons of French rubber from Indo-China would be delivered to Japan through German intervention. He here asked about the size of the auxiliary cruisers possibly to be used for the transportation of the rubber. Matsuoka, who stated that he was not precisely informed, estimated the size at 10,000 tons.

Then the RAM, referring to the discussion with Reich Minister Funk, turned the conversation to the future trade relationship between Japan and Germany. He amplified here the idea that trade between the big economic areas of the future, i.e., Europe and Africa on one hand and the Far East on the other, must develop on a comparatively free basis, whereas the American Hemisphere, at any rate as far as the United States was concerned, would remain self-sufficient, as she had everything that she needed in her own territory, and, therefore, did not come into question in connection with exchanges with other economic areas. In South America, however, things were different. Here exchange possibilities with other economic areas actually presented themselves.

Matsuoka replied that she needed cooperation with Germany for her own reconstruction and for the development of China. He had already some time ago given written instructions to the Japanese missions in China to grant preferential treatment to German and Italian economic interests, similar to what was already carried out in Manchukuo and North China. Japan was not in a position to develop the extensive areas in China without the assistance of German technical science and German enterprise. Outwardly she will, of course, declare the open door policy, in actual fact, however, she will concede preferential treatment to Germany and Italy.

He must moreover admit openly that Japanese business circles feared their German competitors, whom they considered as very competent, whereas they were only amused at British and American competitors. German business circles had such the same opinion about the Japanese, which resulted in complaints from both sides. He was, however, of the opinion that the interests of both sides could be brought into harmony and told Japanese industry not to be afraid of German competition but rather to attempt to solve the problem by equal efficiency. In any case, the Japanese Government would do everything in order to equalize the interests of both sides.

* * * * *

Following this, Matsuoka once again turned the conversation to Japanese-Russian relations. He pointed out that he had proposed a Non-Aggression Pact to the Russians, to which Molotov had replied with a proposal of a neutrality agreement. Therefore, during his stay in Moscow, he must adopt the attitude of having been the one to make

the original non-aggression proposal. He also wanted to take this opportunity to try to induce the Russians to forego the Northern half of the Sakhalien Peninsula. There were important oil resources there, against the exploitation of which the Russians were making every conceivable difficulty. Matsuoka estimated the total maximum quantity which could be obtained from these oil resources at 2 million tons. He would make an offer to the Russians to acquire North Sakhalien by purchase.

To a question by the RAM whether the Russians would be prepared to sell these territories, Matsuoka replied that this was highly doubtful. Molotov had asked the Japanese Ambassador, on a suggestion to this effect, whether "this was supposed to be a joke". Japan was in any case prepared to make other agreements as the equivalent of the Forts-mouth and Feking Treaties and also to give up her fishing rights. In any case he would have to take up these matters and, above all, the question of the Non-aggression Pact during his stay at Moscow. He asked the RAM whether he should deal with these questions very deeply or only just touch on them.

The RAM replied that he was of the opinion that these points would be dealt with only in a purely formal way and would not be gone into deeply. The question mentioned by MATSUOKA regarding Sakhalien could be settled even later. Should the Russians follow a stupid policy and compel Germany to strike, he would, in view of the temper of the Japanese Army in China, consider it right if this army were prevented from acting against Russia. Japan was helping the joint issue best if she did not allow herself to be diverted by anything from the action against Singapore. With a joint victory, the fulfilment of the aforementioned desires would in any case fall into the lap of Japan as a ripe fruit to a large extent.

MATSUOKA then introduced the subject of German assistance in the blow against Singapore, a subject which had been broached to him frequently, and mentioned the proposal of a German written promise of assistance.

The RAM replied that he had already discussed these questions with Ambassador OSHIMA. He had asked him to procure maps of Singapore in order that the FUHRER - who probably must be considered the greatest expert on military questions at the present time - could advise Japan on the best method of attack against Singapore. German experts on aerial warfare, too, would be at her disposal; they could draw up a report, based on their European experiences, for the Japanese on the use of dive-bombers from airfields in the vicinity against the British fleet in Singapore. Thus the British fleet would be forced to disappear from Singapore immediately.

MATSUOKA remarked that Japan was less concerned with the British fleet than with the capture of the fortifications.

The RAM replied that here, too, the FUHRER had developed new methods for the German attacks on strongly fortified positions, such as the Maginot Line and Port Eben Ezer, which he could make available to the Japanese.

MATSUOKA replied in this connection that some of the younger, expert Japanese Naval officers, who were close friends of his, were of the opinion that the Japanese naval forces would need three months until they could capture Singapore. As a cautious Foreign Minister, he had doubled this estimate. He believed he could stave off any danger which threatened from America for six months. If, however, the capture of Singapore required still more time and if the operations even dragged out for a year, the situation with America would become extremely critical and he did not know as yet how to meet it.]

If at all avoidable, he would not touch the Netherlands East Indies, since he was afraid that in the event of a Japanese attack on this area the oilfields would be set on fire. They would be brought into operation again only after 1 or 2 years.

The RAM added that Japan would gain decisive control over the Netherlands East Indies simultaneously with the capture of Singapore.

Matsuoka then further mentioned that the desire for airbases in French Indo-China and Thailand had been divulged by Japanese officer circles. He had, however, denied this, as he in no way wished to undertake anything which could in any way disclose Japanese intentions regarding Singapore.

Finally the RAM once more reverted to the question of Germany's help to Japan. Perhaps something could be done also here. Japan had, however, to bear in mind that, in this war, the heaviest burden was resting on Germany's shoulders. The Reich was fighting against the British Isles and was tying up the British Mediterranean Fleet. Japan, on the other hand, was fighting only on the surface. Apart from that, Russia's main weight lay on the European side. These facts the gallant Japanese Nation would certainly acknowledge.

Matsuoka finally agreed to this point of view and gave an assurance that Japan would always be a loyal ally who would devote herself entirely, and not just in a lukewarm way, to the joint effort.

[Berlin. 31 March 1941.]